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THE FORGOTTEN POW:  
SECOND LIEUTENANT REBA Z. WHITTLE, AN

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MARY E.V. FRANK, AN

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## USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

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### THE FORGOTTEN POW: SECOND LIEUTENANT REBA Z. WHITTLE, AN

An Individual Study Project  
Intended for Publication

by

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## ABSTRACT

**AUTHOR:** Mary E.V. Frank, LTC, AN

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During World War II, 68 Army nurses and 16 Navy nurses were taken prisoner. The stories of all, except one, have been documented. Second Lieutenant Reba Z. Whittle, AN, was captured when the air evacuation flight on which she was serving as the flight nurse strayed into enemy territory on September 27, 1944 and was shot down. She was imprisoned until her repatriation following a prisoner exchange in January 1945. During her imprisonment she kept a diary of her experiences. This study documents her story through the annotation of that diary. The annotation consists of background information for the period prior to her capture, an elaboration of some details she provides, and an overview of her repatriation and return home, and her later efforts at obtaining disability benefits. A comparison of her imprisonment with the internment of the nurses in the Philippines also is made. *Keywords: Prisoners of War, Army Nurse, World War II, Philippines, Repatriation, Disability Benefits.*

## INTRODUCTION

Professional nurses have cared for the members of the U.S. Armed Forces in every conflict since the Spanish-American War. Their ministry often places them relatively close to the front lines. Although nurses died in the line of duty in the earlier wars, it was not until World War II that U.S. military nurses were detained by the enemy. During World War II, 68 Army and 16 Navy nurses were imprisoned. The stories of all, except one, have been documented.

The nurses in the Southwest Pacific (SWPA) were the first to be captured. Only two days after Pearl Harbor, December 10, 1941, five Navy nurses on Guam were taken prisoner by the Japanese. Zentsuji Prison, Shikoku Island, a dimly lighted, unheated old army barracks, was their home until their repatriation in Mozambique, Portuguese South Africa, on August 25, 1942. They returned home on the S.S. GRIPSHOLM.

Eleven of their Navy sisters assigned to the Canaceo Naval Hospital in Manila soon met a similar fate. Following a bombing raid that destroyed the hospital on December 11, 1941, the Navy nurses were temporarily evacuated to the Manila Hospital Center, the designation given to Sternberg General Hospital and its newly acquired annexes. The following week the Navy personnel were scattered, working

wherever needed. They rejoined as a group, less one, on December 26th at Santa Scholastica Musical College where a naval hospital was established. One nurse, who was attached to a surgical team, had left Manila on December 24th with an Army contingent to establish a hospital on Bataan. She continued with the group to Corregidor and was evacuated to the U.S. on the submarine SPEARFISH on May 3, 1942-- the only Navy nurse to escape. New Year's Day ushered in a new life for the Navy nurses. Manila fell to the Japanese and the nurses were captured. They continued to care for patients at Santa Scholastica Musical College until March 8, 1942 when they entered the Santo Tomas Internment Camp (STIC) a few miles away at Santo Tomas University. They again continued their nursing duties in the camp hospital set up in the machine shop, providing health care until the arrival of the Army nurses inside STIC on August 25, 1942. They then helped move the hospital into the nearby Santa Catalina Girls School and staffed it and its annexes along with the Army nurses until May 14, 1943 when they left Santo Tomas for Los Banos along with 787 men to set up a new work camp. Again they established an infirmary. Despite severe malnutrition and disease, all eleven nurses were working when they were liberated on February 23, 1945. Although one of the first groups to be captured, the tactical situation resulted in their being the last group liberated and returned home.

Due to their comparatively large numbers and the mobility of the troops they supported, the Army nurses and, later Army Medical Specialist Corps members, had a variety of experiences. Twenty-two of the nurses were safely evacuated, but the remaining 67 nurses, 3

dietitians and 1 physical therapist ultimately endured the same fate as their Navy sisters.

The bombing of the Philippines on December 8, 1941 started a series of reassignments for the Army contingent that would continue until 1945. As the outlying clinics were threatened or damaged, the nurses moved into Manila where annexes to Sternberg General hospital were opened to accept the seemingly non-stop flow of casualties.

By mid-December the majority of the Army contingent was in Manila. Thirteen nurses were at Fort Mills on Corregidor and two others were at their small post hospital at Camp John Hay in the mountains near Baguio. Busy with the casualties from the bombing of their area, the Baguio nurses were unable to get to Manila when their area was ordered evacuated on December 22nd. In hopes of getting to Bataan, they began an arduous and dangerous mountainous climb with the men of Camp John Hay. After more than thirty hours they reached a sawmill encampment, Lasud. While the men went on, the nurses remained at the encampment to provide care for the civilians gathered there. They remained part of that group which surrendered on December 28th, after which they were ordered to Baguio where they were eventually interned in the Baguio Internment Camp. They continued nursing and stayed together until September 1943 when the Japanese allowed one nurse to rejoin the other Army nurses at Santo Tomas. The remaining nurse, who had grown up in Baguio, elected to remain behind. She stayed there until December 1944 when the Baguio

internees were moved into a section of the Bilibid military prison in Manila. She rejoined the nurses after liberation on February 4, 1945.

In Manila, the Army nurses were ordered to evacuate on December 23, 1941. Thirty-one Army nurses and one Navy nurse left Manila by truck and boat for Limay on the southeast coast of Bataan during the next forty-eight hours. They set up Hospital No. 1. Twenty more left on the harbor boat, McHYDE, before midnight on Christmas Day. They organized the nursing activities of Hospital No. 2 at Lamao, Bataan. Yet another group left that same evening. Ten of those nurses went to Corregidor where the hospital wing of the Malinta Tunnel was opened. Twelve nurses remained at Sternberg to care for the patients who were too ill to be removed from Manila. On December 29th it was decided that they, too, should leave. Eleven nurses departed via harbor boat about midnight. The twelfth nurse accompanied the stable patients on the makeshift hospital ship, MACTAN, to Australia on December 31st. The patients too ill to travel were left behind in the care of the Navy nurses.

The nurses on Bataan cared for large numbers of sick and wounded while enduring the same privations as the men. As conditions worsened the nurses were ordered to Corregidor while preparations were made for the surrender of Bataan. Leaving Bataan on April 8, 1942 they escaped the infamous death march.

On Corregidor they joined the nurses already working in the Malinta tunnel fortress. The workload and bombings had not changed; the improved food supply did not last long; and they had traded the open air for the stench of the tunnel. For some, however, there was escape. On April 29th twenty nurses left in two Navy seaplanes, and on May 3rd eleven Army nurses and one Navy nurse left via the submarine SPEARFISH. Even when off Corregidor they were not guaranteed safety. One plane with ten nurses on board was unable to take off after refueling at Lake Lanao, Mindanao. That group moved to a nearby Army post where they again provided nursing care and on May 10, 1942, they, too, surrendered. They were interned in a Catholic convent in Davao until September when they joined their Army and Navy compatriots in the Santo Tomas Internment Camp.

Freedom for the women remaining on Corregidor was short-lived. On May 6, 1942, Corregidor surrendered, following a massive Japanese offensive. The nurses were issued Red Cross Arm Bands with registered numbers before they met their captors. On July 2nd they were transported to Manila and taken to the internment camp at Santo Tomas University. They remained segregated until August 25th-- the day the Navy nurses from Guam were repatriated. They then joined in caring for the internees with the Navy nurses until the Navy nurses left for Los Banos the following May. The women remained as "guests" of the Japanese until liberation on February 3, 1945. Although liberated that evening, they worked through the night to care for the casualties of the liberation effort. <sup>1</sup>



The history of the nurses imprisoned by the Japanese is relatively well documented. The Army Nurse Corps has three unpublished manuscripts authored by them and a series of oral history interviews. There are also countless newspaper and magazine accounts written following their return home. In addition, in 1985 the Department of Defense released a documentary film on them entitled "We All Came Home."

Unbeknownst to the nurses in the Pacific, late in their stay on September 27, 1944, a sister Army nurse, Second Lieutenant Reba Z. Whittle, was captured by the Germans. Aside from a two sentence acknowledgement in the film concerning her capture and release, and one newspaper article following her death in 1981, there is little formal documentation of her experience. The intent of this study is to formally document her story through the annotation of the diary she kept from September 27th through early November 1944, which was graciously provided to the author by her husband, Colonel Stanley W. Tobiason, USAF, Ret. In addition, her repatriation and her remaining time on active duty, as well as her attempts to obtain a medical retirement will be documented. Finally, a comparison of her experience with the nurse POWs in SWPA will be made.

#### 1941-1944

A new graduate of the Medical and Surgical Memorial Hospital School of Nursing in San Antonio, Texas, Reba Zitella Whittle applied for an appointment as a Reserve Nurse, U.S. Army, in June 1941. With

one year of college at North Texas State College as a home economics major, she was slightly older and better educated than many volunteers. Following her entrance physical examination at the Station Hospital, Fort Sam Houston, Texas on June 10, 1941 she was initially disqualified for service because of being underweight. At 67 inches, she was a slender 117 pounds which was seven pounds below the minimum weight allowed.<sup>2</sup> The defect was waived, however, and she was advised to diet and rest to increase her weight.

Her orders, dated June 13, 1941, stated she was "assigned to active duty with the Army of the United States for a minimum period of one year, effective June 17, 1941, and will continue on this status until relieved for the convenience of the Government or otherwise."<sup>3</sup> After taking the prescribed oath, she was assigned to active service as a Reserve Nurse, Army Nurse Corps, with the relative rank of Second Lieutenant, and was given serial number N734426. She reported to the Albuquerque Air Base, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and was assigned to CASC Unit No.1848. She was then attached to the Detachment Medical department for duty. For the next 27 months she served as a general duty ward nurse first at the Station Hospital, Kirkland Field, New Mexico, and later at the Station Hospital, Mather Field, California.<sup>4</sup> In both assignments she received excellent performance ratings.<sup>5</sup>

In January 1943, Lieutenant Whittle applied for the Army Air Forces School of Air Evacuation. All applicants for the school were volunteers. The C-47s used for air evacuation served in a dual capacity. They carried cargo and troops to the battlefronts and after unloading

were rapidly converted into ambulance planes. Because of their dual use, they were not marked with the Geneva Red Cross or other designation normally used on hospital planes. Service on them, therefore, was not without risk. Additional prerequisites included six months service in an Army Service Forces or Army Air Forces Unit Hospital, height of 62-72 inches, weight of 105-135 pounds, age 21-36, and Class 3 requirements of WD, AGO Form 64 (Physical Examination for Flying). The fitness evaluation was intentionally stringent as work done at altitudes of five to ten thousand feet is tiring. <sup>6</sup> She easily met all of the requirements. The endorsement of her application from the Surgeon, Station Hospital, Mather Field, read, "In my opinion 2d Lt. Reba Z. Whittle, ANC-Res. has the necessary professional, personality and judgment qualifications for nursing duty with air evacuation units. She has had thirty-seven hours flying time as a passenger in army and commercial aircraft. She is most eager for duty with air evacuation units." <sup>7</sup> School selection was a highly competitive process. She was notified on August 6, 1943 that she was placed on the list of qualified applicants for the school. The letter, signed by Lieutenant Colonel Nellie Close, Chief, Nursing Section, Office of the Air Surgeon, also stated her assignment would be made when additional nurses were required for this training. She did not have to wait long. On September 23, 1943 she reported to the Army Air Forces School of Air Evacuation, Bowman Field, Kentucky.<sup>5</sup>

Initially a four week course, by the time Lieutenant Whittle arrived the program had been expanded to six weeks. The course included some class work in aeromedical evacuation (A/E) , A/E tactics, survival,

aeromedical physiology and mental hygiene in relation to flying. The students also studied plane loading procedures and military indoctrination, and had a one-day bivouac. The intent of the program was to make the nurse largely self-sufficient on the flight. The nurse was required to use the equipment and medical supplies provided on the plane for treatment to relieve pain, to prevent hemorrhage, to treat shock, to administer oxygen, and in every way to meet any circumstances that might be encountered. In contrast to the hospital ward situation, all of this was to be done in the absence of a physician. Only in rare instances did a flight surgeon accompany a patient on a flight.<sup>8</sup> Lieutenant Whittle graduated on November 26, 1943 with an academic rating of excellent. She received a didactic grade of 92 and a practical grade of 91. She was reported to the Air Surgeon as qualified to perform the duties required of a flight nurse and was so rated.<sup>9</sup>

On January 22, 1944, the day her rating was signed by Major General David N.W. Grant, Air Surgeon, Lieutenant Whittle departed the U.S. for assignment with the 813th Medical Aeromedical Evacuation Transportation Squadron (MAETS) in England.<sup>5</sup> The unit was initially at Nottingham, but later moved to Brighton and then to Grove. From January until September Lieutenant Whittle flew 40 missions, including 80 hours combat flying time and 500 hours total flying time.<sup>10</sup> She made flights to Scotland, Ireland, Belgium, and France. Having read Juanita Redmond's 1943 book, I Served on Bataan, Lieutenant Whittle was aware of the capture of the nurses in the Pacific. The topic of capture was not, however, discussed among the nurses.<sup>11</sup> On September 27, 1944, Lieutenant Whittle left on a

"routine" mission to return casualties. That mission was not completed. Instead, she became the sole American nurse captured and imprisoned by the Germans. Her diary, presented here in an annotated form, provides us insight into her experience as a POW. Her writing is not edited.

## DIARY

Wednesday Sept. 27, 1944 I left England with big intentions of returning as to go to London on my day off starting Thursday, Sept. 28th.<sup>1</sup>

Was sleeping quite soundly in the back of our hospital plane until suddenly awakened by terrific sounds of guns and cracklings of the plane as if it had gone into bits. For a few moments I hardly knew what to think. Can assure anyone a more than startled expression and sensation. Suddenly looked at my Surgical Tech opposite me with blood flowing from his left leg. The noise by this time seemed to be much worse. But to see the left engine blazing away - is simply more than I can express - But never thought I would land on the ground in one peace [sic]. My prayers were used and quick.

Started to scream and cry as most women would - but Sgt. Hill consoled me and assured it wouldn't help - at that time I realized no value would be of benefit and he had been injured and should be the one crying. About that time he was hit in the left arm as I had my head on his left shoulder.

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<sup>1</sup> The aircraft was proceeding to Strip A-92 in France to pick up 24 patients on litters. It is believed the pilot ran off his course into enemy territory.

Memo, Headquarters, 813th Med Air Evac Trans Sqdn., APO 149, US Army, for CG, US Strategic Air Forces in Europe, 12 Oct 1944, sub: Non-Battle Casualty Report.

Minutes definitely didn't seem short but hours as to how long this went on - I certainly have no idea myself.<sup>2</sup> And suddenly we hit the ground splash - myself landing in the navigators compartment head first. The ship was nearly blazing and holes every place - some large enough to crawl through back in the fuselage. Noticed the others crawling out the top hatch - so immediately went zooming out - 3 out before I - the pilot last - who fell as if he had been badly wounded. One never came out.<sup>3</sup>

Immediately we saw soldiers not many yards away. At first we thought they were British soldiers. Second glance we recognized they were German GIs. This feeling is one never dreamed of having. But thought - we've had it chum. The first thought in my mind - my boy friend and he would be waiting back at my quarters that evening.<sup>4</sup> But how thankful and grateful to be alive.

They took a glance c. their guns pointing and immediately one took out a bandage and put around my head as it was bleeding.<sup>5</sup> The surprised look on their faces when they saw a woman was amazing. But they bandaged us and away we marched our ship still burning. The firing was terrific, the sounds terrific. This is where I actually thought of my training that we had back in Louisville as I really wanted to hug the ground - But the German soldiers only laughed and motioned they were above my head. But to say the least felt sure they were coming for us.

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<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant Whittle received a concussion and a severe laceration of the forehead. Later that day, she developed back pain, head pain and dizziness.

Clinical History, Letterman Army Hospital, San Francisco, CA, August 6, 1953. Official Military Personnel File, Reba Z. Whittle, N 734426 (hereafter referred to as OMPF).

<sup>3</sup> The crew consisted of the following members:  
Second Lieutenant Whittle, Flight Nurse  
Sergeant Hill, Surgical Technician  
First Lieutenant Ralph Parker, Pilot  
Second Lieutenant David Forbes, Co-Pilot  
Sergeant Harold Bonser, Crew Chief  
Corporal Chester D. Bright

Colonel Stanley W. Tobiason, USAF (Ret.), letter to author, September 1, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant Whittle was engaged to marry Lieutenant Colonel Stanley W. Tobiason, a pilot stationed in England. They married on August 3, 1945.

Interview with Colonel Stanley W. Tobiason, USAF (Ret.), May 20, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> Medical shorthand for Latin "cum" or "with".

They took us to a small village rather a couple of old houses and there we sat on the ground until a officer came and suppose they had a discussion of some sort by the sounds of the conversation - not understanding German couldn't say.

After awhile sitting there some guards march us to a small town about 3/4 or 1 mile where we went into a dank dungeon cellar which really looked very spooky and smelled very bad. There a Dr. came in - had small candles for light and looked each of us over. Only one was really wounded. That being my Sgt. They gave him some M.S. so we thought and they rebandaged the 3 of us who had slight wounds and accidentally cut part of my hair when cutting bandage.<sup>6</sup>

Here they took our personal belongings such as passes and money - rank and name.

The name of the village - sign Achen 4 Kil. - have no idea but it had been practically evacuated, saw only a couple of civilians and occasionally an army vehicle and soldiers running around. Naturally all glaring at us - babbling something which none of us knew what they were saying.

Off again - naturally walking - which had to be very slow on the account of Sgt. Hill's wounded leg. As we walked along the street of the village a German soldier came up and yanked my Air Corps patch off my shoulder and threw it down saying something. For why I don't know unless it was hanging loose as I was the only one he took it off.

Think it took us about an hr and considered it about 2 or 3 miles - that I couldn't be sure but it seemed like miles. Here we came to a neat brick house which at first seemed nice to be at as the firing still whistled.

Marched us in where 4 or 5 German officers sat in this office. There we stood like dummies and them giving us terrific glares. They showed us immediately into another room where the guard gave the Sgt. a glass of wine. Before he had time to complete his wine they pushed us outside. There we sat on

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<sup>6</sup> Medical shorthand for Morphine Sulfate, a common, potent analgesic.

the ground - shivering as it was rather cold with no coats and the shock and scare.<sup>7</sup> We had to sit outside there for some time - until a queer looking truck came up and they motioned for us to get in. The truck was full of junk but seemed good and at least out of the wind. Never a word between the guards and us as neither could understand. So motion system was well carried on.

This time we arrived in a larger village and taken through a stall or barn connected with a house. There they put us in the barn - lay on the floor and shortly came a German officer who interrogated us one by one. A guard gave us some pears which tasted very good as we had nothing to eat all day. Some time passed and the German O. - spoke very good English - took us into the kitchen of this house where we had black German coffee, black bread and butter. Seemed heavenly to have a bit to eat and to be a little warm. During this time several more G. officers came in and looked at our passes they had already collected from us. Each of everyone taking a good glare and saying Swester which means nurse and a very startled look. Don't know how monkeys feel in the zoo with so many people looking at them but thought I must know by now.

This German family was eating their meal later so a very kind old German woman who had talked to me continuously and naturally I couldn't understand a word she said gave me a cup of hot soup. Was afraid to eat it at first but she insisted so I did. As she kept looking at me with such a sympathetic look and my judgment was she knew I was leery of drinking the soup so she got some sauce to season it. Still shook my head so she tasted it and said it was very good. Before I completed it they were after us again.

As we walked out the entire family bid us farewell and shook hands. Was happy to see the bus for at least it was closed in and was rather cold. My Sgt. and I sat in one seat. Know he was in pain as it showed. But too much of a man and gentleman to admit it. This ride was about 40 minutes. Was very dark and

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<sup>7</sup> Lieutenant Whittle was dressed in her flight uniform which consisted of trousers, shirt with maroon tie, high top oxfords and an Eisenhower jacket. She also had a musette bag with her personal belongings in it.

Interview with Helen Rorick, roommate of Lieutenant Whittle at the 813th MAETS, May 20, 1985.



occasionally would pass a vehicle on the dark road and see horses and wagons moving on.

We arrived at a huge looking place surrounded by very high metal fence and a guard at the gate to let us in. All seeming very suspicious to me. Did as ordered out and up those dark steps, naturally our guards still with us and into an office where German officers were sitting. Very little said as no one could speak English. In came a huge container of cold stewed potatoes which they sat in front of us. Not being very hungry after eating bread and butter only a short time before these potatoes just wouldn't go down. Naturally we knew not what next - but they motioned for us to follow again. Up more stairs into a dirty room, they pointed to a straw mattress on the floor, then to me. Joining room was 2 double deck beds for the 4 fellows. Out they went and locked the outside door.

Was so scared and the thoughts of being in the 1st room alone next to the outside door was worse. So got my mattress and pulled it into the others room. There the 5 of us attempted to sleep but little was done. First comes the interpreter asking casual questions. The air raid alarm came and he said, "Well too bad - you know you might be bombed by your own people." And out he went. This night was the longest I ever spent. A continuous tapping went on all night - each time I dozed this would awaken me. Then the horrors of what next went on and on.

Next a.m. they came in and gave us cold black German coffee, black bread and margarine.<sup>8</sup> We ate what we could as we were hungry and knew not when we might eat again. After this we sat in this room for a long time, a guard with us. The fellows drew a circle and pitched coins to pass the time and we gazed out the window. Time went very slowly.

At eleven we left again this time in an old truck on top of wood chips. Seems we went such queer ways and so slow. But the truck ran on wood chips as we were carrying so I found out later. So that explained the slowest and the driver was always killing his engine.

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<sup>8</sup> The date is September 28, 1944.

Stopped in several villages for why I don't know. Once an old man well dressed came up and asked "Americans?" and spoke very good English. He talked to us about 10 minutes. But each time he saw a German officer he would pretend he was leaving. He also wished us good luck. People all gaped at us as they do all POWs but took another glance when they saw a woman. Guess many have wondered just what I was.

Next stop was a German hospital where they unloaded the wood. A German officer takes us in. Where more questions asked. And just what I was - a Dr. came in and looked all over and asked me questions of being a nurse. Shook his head saying, "Too bad having a woman as you are the first one and no one knows exactly what to do."

Sisters brought us in a bowl of hot sauerkraut of a mixture and slim slices of black bread. Which tasted very good as it was hot and very clean. As soon as we had completed out in the yard to wait for the truck to be finished of unloading. People were looking from all windows and every place at us. The sisters got me a chair and I was shivering - so was everyone else. A sister from both sides came with a tray of coffee and soups, one had cream in so the other said that best. Was good and help the shivering. They also brought me an old overcoat which felt wonderful.

Soon we were off again - plus a few German soldiers and an officer - this time to Koln. Seems it took us a very long time as they had loaded empty crates on. Then they stopped at a fruit orchard where they loaded the crates and bags with apples and pears. Wasn't bad as we certainly ate enough of them. They left them off different places and also took the GO some place in Koln. Seems we went in circles in the city before getting to the air field. The city was very badly damaged. Could hardly see a house or building that wasn't torn up or windows in it. Something was still burning as a raid had been just a few hours before we arrived.

At Koln they gave me a room alone - called me out first. Naturally I didn't know what was going on and I definitely didn't want to be alone. This is when I really first let down and cried. They couldn't figure out what was wrong with me.

So I asked for my Surg. Tech to be put in there with me. Felt much better when he came in but couldn't stop crying for quite awhile.

Later a Dr. came in and looked each and everyone over. No one really needed anything except Sgt. Hill. But the Dr. was very good to all and put fresh dressings on.

Went to bed - all we took off was shoes and I neatly slept after I finally got to sleep between air raid alarms. Naturally every move the guard made seem to awaken me - but did rest. Next morning as usual cold coffee and black bread, more alarms and etc.<sup>9</sup>

About 10 a.m. they came after me first where I was taken about a block and a half into one office then into another where about 6-8 officers were. They all rose and greeted me. Again many questions asked me. They also saying what a pity for them to have an American nurse and tried to assure me I would be back very shortly. The shock and everything had me very upset and tears were hard to hold back - a few started down my cheek and they thought some one must have been brutal to me so they asked that. Then they asked if I had had enough of it. So I said yes enough black bread and cold coffee.

Then he takes me into another office where I sat down and he offered me a cigarette - took it as I had none. When I stopped crying he brought the others of the crew into this office and asked them a few questions. Was beyond me why they took me before all the other officers and not them.

Here is where they took everything from us such as pictures, pencils and what had already been taken and we signed for it.<sup>10</sup> Told us we would leave

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<sup>9</sup> The date is September 29, 1944.

<sup>10</sup> Existing Red Cross regulations protected personal property. Removal of personal property by the Germans, however, was commonplace.

Institute of World Policy, Prisoners of War, Washington, Georgetown University, 1948, p. 29.

Removal of personal property was intended to damage morale and lower self-respect. Further, it provided the Germans with leverage to seek information from the prisoners.

evening some time by train for Frankfurt. First start of any POW. Also said the reason of night travel was it was safer.

That day at noon they gave us a very good and hot meal. Nothing like home, but good in comparison. During our stay another American officer was there too. They wouldn't let him talk to us until we all left for the train and he came too.

About 5:30 or 6 late evening, we walked with the officer who escorted us to a trolley, then to the train. Fortunately the train was in so we got in as the officer said, "Out of the cold."

The station seemed rather beaten up. The guard pointed out the huge castle to me and it looked very beautiful of what I could see in the darkness. Traveled all night.

At app. 2 a.m. we stopped to change trains and had a 2 or 3 hour wait.<sup>11</sup> So he takes us down into cellar looking place at the station where about 8 or 10 more American boys and a British boy were. Was very dirty and dingy looking, but was warm and out of the cold. Some of these boys had been at a hospital so they had Red Cross parcels. So we had a bite to eat which was thoroughly enjoyed. The best of all was the cig.

At app. 5 a.m. the entire group of us went up to get on our train. Never saw them again until we got to our destination which was Frankfurt. There we got off and got on a trolley which went very near the Stalag or POW camp.<sup>12</sup> They marched us all up to the camp where we stood outside in sort of a formation.

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James L. Cole, Jr., ed., "Dulag Luft Recalled and Revisted," Aerospace Historian, Vol. 19, Summer 1972, p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> The date is September 20, 1944.

<sup>12</sup> *Auswertestelle West* (Evaluation Center West) was the principal Luftwaffe intelligence center for the entire western theater of operations. It was located in Oberusel, just outside Frankfurt am Main.

Phillip M. Flammer, ed., "Dulag Luft: The Third Reich's Prison Camp for Airmen," Aerospace Historian, Vol. 19, Summer, 1972, pp. 58-59.

By 1944 the Oberusel center had a staff of 300, including 70 officers who processed an average of 2000 POWs per month.

A.J. Barker, Prisoners of War, New York, Universe Books, 1975, p. 64.

Immediately they took the 6 of us in. Only a few minutes after we were inside they asked me to go with one of them. In which I naturally did - not knowing what would happen. Those were sad moments as I left the only people I knew and knew quite well I would never see them - but that was that. Took me to a room about 8x8 ft, motioned for me to enter and closed the door. Well that was a cell and I was locked in proper.<sup>13</sup> Extremely depressing. The more I thought of being in a cell and wondering what to happen next I became terrified and started crying. Felt more like screaming and a perfect wonder I didn't.

Actually I didn't start crying until a guard opened the door and slammed a black sandwich on the table which really sounded like a chunk of wood. Felt just like a child and wanted to throw it back and do wish I could have.

The place was dirty but at least the warmest place we had been and was so tired and filthy myself.

Two German officers came in and just to look at them made me cry more. Think who even it might have been to come in, the same thing would have happened.

Took my name and said how sorry they were to have a nurse as a POW as they had no facilities at all.<sup>14</sup> Asked some questions and said I would go to a hospital near by and they had a few of our boys there.<sup>15</sup> A guard and an officer

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<sup>13</sup> Her experience duplicated that of her male counterparts who on arrival were put alone into small cells just large enough for a bed, table and a small stool.

Flammer, p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> While the Germans were probably sincere in wishing they did not have to contend with the anomaly of having an American female POW, the sympathetic manner was characteristic of the interrogator or *Sonderfuhrer*. Typically, the interrogator would produce a form which purported to require information about the prisoner for the International Red Cross at Geneva. The forms, however, requested more details than allowed under the terms of the Geneva Conventions.

Cole, p. 63.

There is no available evidence that Lieutenant Whittle provided any information other than her name, rank and serial number.

<sup>15</sup> It was the policy of the International Commission of the Red Cross that medical personnel should be given separate lodging within the infirmary itself, or close by, and these requests were usually granted by the Germans.

went with me. They gave me a blanket to wrap around me as it was very cool. Had to walk about 15 min and seemed way up in the woods.

Arrived through locked gates of course and into a large area which was very beautiful - nice lawn, flowers and very nice looking buildings under those huge trees - HoheM.<sup>16</sup> All Germans - Sat me in a small hall gave me coffee, black bread as usual and butter. It did taste good.

A German Sister was getting my room ready and one glance said I could have a bath first if I desired. Naturally that did sound wonderful, but for some reason tears would keep coming. When they took me into the room I felt more or less lost. No clothes except what I had on and had had on since I left 4 days past. Guess I felt sorry for myself.

In came a gentleman first I thought an American but was British with an American R.C. capture kit in it was a men's shorts, socks and what have you - cig., gum. All looked good as that was all the clothes available. Then he brought me a pair of men's trousers.

He left and a German orderly locked my door, then I suddenly got hysterical. A German Sister came in to try and console me, but couldn't speak a bit of English. She was such a sweet old soul. After my cry had calmed - the Ger. Dr. had been in - went to take my bath still crying. Asked for a wash cloth in my motion language and the maid who was mopping thought I was afraid the tub wasn't clean and got some disinfectant and started letting the H2O out of the tub. Then the Sister came with the wash rag. Now it seems funny, but certainly not then.

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International Committee of the Red Cross, Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross on its activities during the Second World War (Sept 1, 1939 - June 30, 1947). Geneva, 1948, p. 208 (hereafter referred to as ICRC).

<sup>16</sup> Hohemark Hospital, part of the *Auswertestelle West*, was located about a half-mile west of the camp proper. Hohemark was a 56 bed hospital designed to provide immediate aid for wounded prisoners.

Flammer, p. 58.

My room was very comfortable with a large down comforter, curtains and spotless overlooking a big garden.<sup>17</sup> The Sisters brought me flowers, fruit and gave me 6 bobby pins.

I ate with a Capt. Stuffan and W.O. Stanley who worked there. They took me for walks in the area morning and evening.<sup>18</sup>

The surprised looks of some of our boys to see me was amazing. Anyway they all treated me swell.

The morning of Oct 6, 1944 left with a G. officer for Obermassfeld - left at 9 a.m. and arrived about 7:15 p.m.<sup>19</sup> Had a box lunch along. Naturally every one would gaze to see a worn POW with a guard. But that didn't bother me much - was wondering what would happen to me. Felt sure I was going to find news on me returning home.<sup>20</sup>

This was a British and American hospital run by British Drs.

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<sup>17</sup> The Hohemark Hospital had been a private sanitarium and was, therefore, well equipped and surrounded by a beautiful park.

Arthur Durand, "Stalag Luft III: An American Experience In A World War II German Prisoner of War Camp." (Ph.D. dissertation, The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> The International Committee of the Red Cross requested that medical personnel get special privileges to compensate them for not being repatriated. In Germany, medical personnel and chaplains could go for a walk of two hours and a half, three times a week.

ICRC, pp. 208 and 264.

<sup>19</sup> The hospital was described in a letter to Lieutenant Whittle's parents from the fiancée of a British physician imprisoned there. "The camp is in a very beautiful and healthy part of the country, the nearest big town is Weimar (Thuringen). The buildings are proper brick ones and conditions are good, bed with sheets and adequate heating arrangements."

Alisa M. Duxbury, letter to Mr. and Mrs. Whittle, December 6, 1944. Personal papers of Colonel Stanley W. Tobiason, USAF (Ret.).

<sup>20</sup> Article 12 of the Geneva Conventions lays down the principle that medical personnel may not be detained after they have fallen into the hands of the enemy and that they will be repatriated, as soon as a route for their return is open and military considerations permit. Article 12, Section 2 and Article 14, Section 4 allow for exception in stipulating that by mutual agreement belligerents may retain some proportion of the medical personnel to care for their fellow POWs,

ICRC p. 201.

Lieutenant Whittle was briefed on the Geneva Convention while at Aeromedical Evacuation School.

Maj Sherman the SBO met me and was extremely nice to me.<sup>21</sup> But he was extremely overworked and over crowded and his problem was a place to even put me up to sleep as they had all men. So he placed me in an examination room to sleep.

Helped the Maj. with some Diptheria shots in his dispensary and he also started me on my shots.

Next a.m. are in there so called mess combination living quarters for some of the Drs. Later the Maj. takes me for a tour over the hospital.<sup>22</sup> All the boys seeming very glad so see an American nurse plus being greatly surprised and all anxious to hear how I was taken.

Shall never forget one of our boys by the name of Davis from Dallas who had lost his right arm. His kind words and hospitality was really appreciated. Then to see how he made himself so useful after having an arm off was remarkable.

All the hospital staff were very good, but I especially liked Maj. Sherman as he dealt with me more and acted CO and can never express my full thanks to him. About noon he came and told me I would go to Meiningen as they had several bus loads of pts. going. So left for my new place again. By this time I was wondering if I would even stay there.<sup>23</sup> But never the less obeyed as they definitely had no place for a girl there.

With the load of pts. arrived at this place about 4:30 p.m. A very large building which used to be an old concert hall. A few barracks scattered in the yard behind the barbed wire. Many fellows out in the yard.

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<sup>21</sup> The SBO is the Senior British Officer.

<sup>22</sup> The date is October 7, 1944.

<sup>23</sup> Lieutenant Whittle was able to send a cable to her parents, dated October 19th, which stated, "Just arrived here [Reserve Lazarett, Meiningen Stalag Nine C] in good health."

Howard F. Bresee, Colonel, C.M.P., Assistant Director, Prisoner of War Division, Prisoner of War Information Bureau, Office of the Provost Marshal General letter to Mr. Edward F. Whittle, November 1, 1944. OMPF.



A British sanitater who came with us presented me to a Scottish Capt. by name of Bill Havrie who then took me where the 6 of them stayed introducing me to the S.B.O by name of Capt. Wooding.

He was especially nice and said a room was being made ready for me. Was so happy to meet a Maj. Evans from Tenn. in charge of all clothing. He said if ever he could be of any help to call on him. I felt as if I could always look on him, as a guardian.

My room was on the 4th floor and I was the only person on that floor. They put little scanty curtains and fixed my room up as nice as possible which was very comfortable. Their orderly took care of me as well and awakened me each morning and brought my washing H2O.

Sunday Oct 8 - my first walk in the mountains. They were allowed walks with a guard so many hours a week. Thoroughly enjoyed this but not being use to walking was extremely tiring. The country was perfectly beautiful.

Capt. Laurie took me around the entire hospital to see all the boys. Was greeted cordially by all but naturally I felt very out of place being among over 500 men.

That night the boys had a concert which they had to alter considerably in order to have a woman present and thoroughly appreciated them making the arrangements. The show was very good - had different skits, song. Was very hard to understand the British and Scottish boys and usually all our boys would yell out translation.

They had several of them and one anthem they had made up a song to John Brown about the staff in which they noticed me since I was considered part of their staff.<sup>24</sup> All was very cute. They had some very talented boys.

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<sup>24</sup> "We also have a Lady Nurse, who come from Texas Way,  
She strokes your hand, and pats your cheek, and smoothes  
your cares away,  
But when she looks into your eyes - O-Boy! - it's just OK  
In Meiningen Lazarett (Chorus - Glory, etc)

Monday Oct 9 - I started to work in the Massage room. Mainly on burn cases by supervision of Lt. Sinclair, a Scottishman, who was one of my favorites later on. This helped pass my time and gave me something to do each day. Had my own patients and enjoyed talking to them. As most were USAs which pleased me.

This hospital was one where patients came after so long as very sick ones to get legs and PT - it was called a rehabilitation center. The work was perfectly marvelous these 2 Scottish men did . . . leg joints all movable and teaching the boys with artificial legs to walk. They had a big gym. Capt. Laurie gave all his exercises to these boys in casts with legs off.

All his machines and exercise apparatus had been made with British materials. No help from the Germans.

They had a leg shop where 3 boys worked every day making legs which were certainly excellent to be made out of what they could get. And to think these boys had never done this in civilian life.

Several occasions the officers invited me to their private messes to have evening tea. They would save until they had sufficient ingredients and made cake or a sort of pie - which were very good. Food wasn't much as a rule, but we never went hungry.

The German rations to POWs were very little, but again the Red Cross comes in.<sup>25</sup> The American, British and Canadian all sent R.C. food parcels which actually saved many from going hungry. At first full parcels but shortly after I arrived everyone went on half which made it a little less. But most foods were CHO starch so no one lost much weight.<sup>26</sup>

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Sergeant L. Crowther, "In Meiningen Lazarett", humorous composition to the tune of John Brown's Body. Personal papers of Colonel Stanley W. Tobiason, USAF (Ret.)

<sup>25</sup> Medical personnel were often granted extra food rations as a means of compensating them for not being repatriated.

ICRC, p. 208.

<sup>26</sup> CHO is an abbreviation for carbohydrate.

Never got over my feeling out of place and I stuck to my room most of the time especially after I moved one floor down to a very long room with a stove in it.<sup>27</sup>

Capt Laurie had 3 pictures framed for me, curtains were made, had a bedside table, a table and a tiny cupboard in my room. Only room to get around - but found it quite comfortable. Capt. Laurie also had me an easy chair made.

They all actually were too good to me. Always trying to get or make me something to be more comfortable and make me happy.

One fellow gave me a small bag with an old white shirt and some hankies in it.

A South African gave me a lovely bottle of perfume which he had carried through Sicily and Italy and had been a POW for 4 years. He was very timid and shy as he gave it to Maj. Evans the A. Supply officer to give it to me.

Some of the boys made little what nots for me.<sup>28</sup> Some sending them up and wouldn't give their names. Usually found out later and thanked them as I certainly appreciated each and every one.

After about 4 weeks of no lipstick, one day Maj. Sherman sent me some over - again this was stuff from home send to the boys in the dramatic supply. Wasn't what I would buy back home, but think I was more proud of it than any expensive brand I would buy. As this was my only thing to be feminine. Was too bad I didn't get out of the plane with my jacket as I even had nail polish in the pocket.

The German officer in charge got his wife to get me a few more bobbie pins and curlers. So I took great pride in my hair.

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<sup>27</sup> In a letter to her parents she wrote, "Then the wearing of trousers continuously makes any normal woman feel very conspicuous and out of place."

Rheba Z. Whittle, POW Stalag Luft IXC, letter to parents, November 3, 1944.  
Personal papers of Colonel Stanley W. Tobiason, USAF (Ret.).

<sup>28</sup> English flyers gave her the silk lining from their flying boots with which she made her underthings.

Captain Arthur Dreyer, "The 'Kriege Press'", Air Force, Vol. 29, March 1946, p. 18.

The H2O was very hard and it made my hair sticky and gummy. Was a terrible mess until I caught more H2O to wash it in and that solved the problems and made a great difference.

Was allowed a bath once a week and that day was always enjoyed. Then the problem was of it being warm. Was much luckier than the boys as the orderly brought me a pitcher of warm H2O night and mornings so I had a sponge bath twice a day in my room.

Did my own washing in my room of my towels and pajamas - only had 2 of each. But this always passed time. Therefore, more or less enjoyed doing it.

Passing time was the great problem. My mornings were OK as I worked, afternoons and evenings sometimes seemed like days. Tried reading as they had a fair size library but my mind just couldn't stay on a book. Tried drawing, painting, embroidery, knitting, making little animals.

During my stay the Swiss Board came by to see boys who were to be repatriated. All amputations automatically would and others went before the board. I didn't see this board, but about 4 weeks later the Swiss Welfare Commission came by and they were to see me.

Was so in hopes they would have some news on me. They were very nice to talk to but knowing little about my case and said it was so unique. Naturally I was quite disappointed. Not being able to gather anything new of what would be done. They said it all was held up on my government to reply a decision of what they wanted to do.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The following communique was sent to the Secretary of State, "Foreign Office note November 16, states Swiss Legation, Berlin, writes November 3 Reba Whittle USA Nursing Corps No. 734426 captured by Germans September 27 now detained reserve Lazarett Obermassfeld (Stalag IXC).

In transmitting foregoing, Swiss Legation, Berlin requests information whether special agreement concluded between American and German Governments regarding repatriation Women Auxiliary Corps personnel."

Harrison, cable to Secretary of State, Washington, November 18, 1944. OMPF.

Promised to gather all information available from our embassy when they returned to Swiss. Also see what the G. government had to say in Berlin.

One of my surprises was on Nov 23 when I had a message from an old friend who I had known back in San Antonio when he was a cadet and I a student nurse. Many people around who I had not known previous. Therefore it really cheered me up.

The message was sent by another officer who thought my name slightly familiar. When he saw me he remembered we came to England on the same boat - had even played cards and seen a show together. He had run around on the boat with a good friend of mine. Also knew many of the girls from my squadron. Therefore I thoroughly enjoyed talking with him and he also said the same. To me seemed I had actually known the boy all my life. After 2 months of seeing so many of our boys and never one you had known previous.

## EPILOGUE

Lieutenant Whittle ceased writing in her diary at the end of November 1944. She did not record a reason for stopping, nor did she ever discuss it with her husband.<sup>12</sup> It can only be hypothesized that she became busy with the preparations for the holiday season. Her depression may also have lifted once she was aware the International Committee of the Red Cross was investigating ways of expediting her repatriation.

## REPATRIATION

Lieutenant Whittle's repatriation was delayed until the end of January 1945. The delay was not uncommon, as real difficulties frequently arose in connection with the practical organization of any convoys.<sup>13</sup> She was told she was being exchanged for German prisoners of war. She left Stalag Luft IX on the evening of January 25, 1945 accompanied by members of the German Red Cross. She was placed in a boxcar along with a number of other prisoners, the majority of whom were ill. Some of them appeared to be psychiatric casualties. She first went to Switzerland. There a Swiss couple took her to their home and she was able to have her first truly hot bath in months.<sup>14</sup> The following day she was repatriated with 109 other American prisoners of war.<sup>15</sup>

Two Battle Casualty Reports were received in Washington. The first, dated January 26, 1945, was from Bern, Switzerland, and stated

she had been exchanged.<sup>16</sup> The second, February 2, 1945, was from Marseilles, and stated she had departed.<sup>17</sup> The War Department responded to both messages and cabled her parents. The first said,

The Chief of Staff of the Army directs me to advise you that your daughter Second Lieutenant Reba Z. Whittle has been repatriated and is being returned to United States to arrive New York New York aboard GRIPSHOLM in near future. You may telegraph and write her care of Commanding General Halloran Hospital Staten Island New York where she will be taken after arrival. Arrangements have been made for her to send you a personal message immediately after reaching that hospital. Please do not attempt to be present at port when boat docks as security reasons prevent your seeing her there. She will be given leave at an early date unless her physical condition necessitates continued hospitalization in which event every effort will be made to transfer her to a hospital near her home. The War Department invites submission of a brief message not to exceed twenty five words that you may desire be sent to your daughter for attempted delivery to her before sailing . . . .<sup>18</sup>

The second telegram corrected the information and stated she would arrive in Washington, D.C. on February 3, 1945.<sup>19</sup> Had she returned on the S.S. GRIPSHOLM she would have returned on the same ship which returned the Navy nurse POWs from Mozambique in August 1942. Instead she flew home, which is probably more in keeping with her status as a flight nurse. She did, however, spend some time aboard the hospital ship, the ALGONQUIN. The first night after her repatriation she was visited by her fiance, Lieutenant Colonel Stanley W. Tobiason, USAF. They were able to spend the evening together before he returned to England.<sup>12</sup> While awaiting her transportation to the states, she received a congratulatory telegram from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, which said,

As your Commander in Chief, I take pride in your past achievements and express the thanks of a grateful Nation for your services in combat and your steadfastness while a prisoner of war.

May God grant each of you happiness and an early return to health. <sup>20</sup>

While her health was a primary concern, Lieutenant Whittle underwent a security orientation as well as physical examinations. On February 6, 1945 she signed a certificate which stated,

I understand that all information concerning escape, evasion from capture, activities and equipment in connection therewith, and details of imprisonment or release from internment, is SECRET and must not be disclosed to anyone except the military officials specifically designated. I further understand that disclosure to any other person will make me liable to disciplinary action for failure to safeguard MILITARY INFORMATION.

I realize that publicity concerning my experiences, by word of mouth or otherwise, will endanger the lives of many persons and therefore it is my duty to take all possible precautions to prevent it. <sup>21</sup>

This statement may explain the virtual absence of publicity on her return until after the war had ended.

Other, more positive, administrative details also were taken care of in the next few months. On February 7, 1945 she received the Purple Heart for the head wound she received during the crash.<sup>22</sup> On the 17th she received the Air Medal , "For meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flights. . .in unarmed and unarmored aircraft."<sup>23</sup> On March 2, 1945 she was promoted to First Lieutenant after 4 years, 2 months and 13 days time in grade as a Second Lieutenant with 40 missions, 80 hours combat flying time and 500 hours total flying time.<sup>10</sup>



She also received a medical assessment and treatment. She was admitted to Walter Reed Hospital on February 5, 1945 and was transferred to Brooke General Hospital on February 12, 1945 to be closer to her home. Her clinical records state that on admission she complained of dizzy spells and a feeling of weakness. They also noted she had sustained a laceration over the left supra-orbital area of the forehead and general contusions of her body in the crash of the aircraft. She remained hospitalized for observation and treatment of a urological condition until April 23, 1945 when she was discharged to convalescent leave for 21 days. She returned on May 8th. On the 11th a disposition board returned her "to duty in a temporary limited service status within the Continental United States to automatically revert to full military duty status on 11 November 1945." <sup>24</sup>

On May 18, 1945 Lieutenant Whittle was assigned to the Army Air Forces Redistribution Station #2, Miami Beach, Florida. There she received yet another physical. It determined her ability to continue as a flight nurse. Unfortunately that physical ended in the submission of an indefinite suspension from flying status for her. She was determined to be physically disqualified for flying duty by reason of pruritus and recurrent, frontal headaches. <sup>25</sup>

Disqualified from flying, she was assigned as a ward nurse at the AAF Regional and Air Debarkation Hospital, Hamilton Field, California. She arrived there on June 15, 1945. On August 3, 1945 she married Lieutenant Colonel Stanley W. Tobiason at the chapel at Hamilton Field and then applied to leave active duty. <sup>26</sup>

Like her repatriation, her relief from active duty was delayed by yet another series of physical examinations and by her use of 75 days of terminal leave. On August 31st she appeared before a Disposition Board at Hamilton Field. That board determined her to be fully qualified for military service. Her orders, therefore, stated, "Relief from AD is not by reason of physical disability." She was released from active duty on January 13, 1946. <sup>27</sup>

### QUEST FOR DISABILITY BENEFITS

Despite the findings of the Disposition Board in August 1945, Lieutenant Whittle continued to be plagued by an assortment of physical and psychiatric problems. She sought compensation from the Veterans Administration and was given the following disability ratings:

- 10% for pruritus, chronic, moderate
- 10% for sprain, chronic, lumbar spine
- 10% for fissure
- 50% for post traumatic personality disorder
- 10% for scar of the forehead, moderately disfiguring. <sup>28</sup>

In 1950 she initiated a series of appeals for military medical retirement that lasted ten years. The appeals were very lengthy and most were unsuccessful.

Her first appeal was initiated in August 1950. Supported by the evaluations of civilian physicians who noted post traumatic

encephalopathy, a chronic, severe anxiety reaction and early lumbosacral arthritis, it requested that she be recalled to Letterman Army Hospital for observation. It further requested a determination be made on her eligibility for retirement benefits as a First Lieutenant. Following a review of her records by personnel in the Physical Standards Division of the Office of The Surgeon General (OTSG), a recommendation against initiating a review was made and accepted.<sup>29</sup> She was not apprised of the decision.

She reappealed in May 1951. This time she was told she was ineligible for review due to the provisions of the Career Compensation Act of 1949 (Public Law 351, 81st Congress). That law required that benefits only be provided to members of the uniformed services who are entitled to receive basic pay at the time a determination is made.<sup>30</sup>

She continued to persevere. In April 1952 she requested correction of her military records, contending that her separation in January 1946 was in error. Her records were again reviewed by members of the Physical Standards Division, OTSG, and the opinion offered that she "did not suffer disability of a degree warranting retirement for physical disability at the time of separation from the service. . . ."<sup>31</sup> Despite that opinion the Army Board for Correction of Military Records (ABCMR) pursued the case. On June 26, 1953 she was admitted to Letterman Army Hospital as a designee of the Secretary of the Army for the requested evaluation. Following that evaluation the following disability ratings were recommended by a Physical Evaluation Board:

50% for anxiety reaction, chronic, productive of severe social and industrial inadaptability.  
10% for arthritis, traumatic, lumbar spine with slight limitation of motion.<sup>32</sup>

Despite those recommendations she was again denied retirement. A review of her records by the Army Physical Review Council determined she ". . . was not sufficiently disabled on 13 January 1946 to warrant retirement from the military service for physical disability, under the laws, rules, regulations and policies then in effect."<sup>33</sup> Following a further review of the case, the Physical Evaluation Board was reconvened to determine if she was permanently disabled as a result of her military service at the time of her relief . The board agreed with the findings that the evaluatee had definite medical disability incurred in the line of duty and present at the time of her separation from the service in 1946.<sup>34</sup>

The debate, however, continued. The ABCMR requested another review by the Army Physical Review Council. That council again disagreed with the findings of a permanent disability.<sup>35</sup> The ABCMR then forwarded her record to the Army Physical Disability Appeal Board. In January 1954 that board concurred with the findings of the 1953 Physical Evaluation Board.<sup>36</sup> On February 10, 1954 the ABCMR agreed to correct her records to show she was permanently incapacitated for active duty at the time of her relief from active duty, that she was relieved from active duty by reason of physical disability

and that she was eligible for retirement pay benefits. The board, however, also stated that her disability was not combat incurred. It also limited her receipt of retirement pay from April 1, 1952, the first day of the month in which the application for correction of military records was received by the Department of the Army.<sup>37</sup> Her retroactive pay amounted to \$3,780. On review, the limitation of the initiation of her benefits was ruled to be just due to the medical disagreements. The reviewer cited that the Surgeon General and the Physical Review Council held that there was no disability warranting retirement at the time of her separation while the PEB(twice) and the Appeal Board held to the contrary.<sup>38</sup>

Following yet another review of the case by the Comptroller General, Lieutenant Whittle was offered an additional \$999.08 as settlement of her retroactive pay in February 1955. Had she received all pay retroactive to her date of separation she would have received \$13,760.66. She accepted the adjustment.

In 1960 she started yet another appeal process, this time requesting the full amount of retroactive pay. The contention was she was not able to make a rational decision. In the end she lost this appeal. The certificate she signed in 1955 constituted a complete release by her of any claim against the United States on account of the correction of her military record. The letter from the ABCMR stated, "While such action on her part may not have been in her best interests, it is final and conclusive according to the law. . . ."<sup>39</sup>

No further action was taken by Lieutenant Whittle herself. She remained married to Colonel Tobiason and together they raised two sons. One son eventually graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and flew as a pilot in Vietnam. She never discussed her POW experiences with her sons. Reba Whittle Tobiason died of cancer in January 1981.<sup>12</sup>

In 1983, Colonel Tobiason again queried the Department of the Army. He wrote, "this letter is prompted by the article in the Air Force Times, April 11, 1983 entitled 'VA, DOD Will Honor Female POWs April 9.' It stated that they [DOD,VA] know of no other incidents where American military women have been taken as prisoners."<sup>40</sup> He provided information on his wife and requested verification of her status as a POW. On September 2, 1983 an official statement of prisoner of war service of Reba Z. Whittle N734426 was made.<sup>41</sup> With the production of the DOD documentary film on the nurse POWs, "We All Came Home", mention was made of her story .

## COMPARISON

The stories of the nurse POWs in the Philippines and Lieutenant Whittle in Germany are quite different. Some of the differences are obvious and can be easily explained. Others can be explained by the character of the theaters of operations. The nurses in the Philippines endured combat conditions for up to four months and suffered the

indignity of formal surrender. Lieutenant Whittle, on the other hand, flew from the relative safety of England literally into harm's way. While she did not resist, she did not formally surrender; rather, she was captured. Although she remained with her original crew members for the first few days, she was soon separated from everyone she knew. The SWPA nurses were, however, probably psychologically protected by their numbers. The cultures of the belligerents also affected their experiences. The Japanese could not conceive of women in the military. The nurses were, therefore, placed in the civilian Santo Tomas Internment Camp rather than a Prisoner of War Camp. Those nurses were interned for almost four years vs. Lieutenant Whittle's imprisonment of four months. Fortunately for Lieutenant Whittle, Germany was a signatory to the 1939 Geneva Conventions and largely obeyed that agreement. As a direct result of that convention, she was repatriated while the nurses in the Philippines had to await liberation.

The differences that are less easy to explain are the acclaim the different groups received when they returned home and the reception Lieutenant Whittle's appeals received. There are countless newspaper and magazine accounts of the experiences of the nurses interned in the Philippines. Although she preceded them by only a month, there were virtually none on Lieutenant Whittle's return. A possible explanation may be found in the nondisclosure document she signed. Adherence to its directions may have eliminated recognition of her return. The nurses from the Philippines were not held to the same standard. The difference may have been that the war in the Philippines was over and

all the POWs had been liberated. Their disclosure of their experiences would not, therefore, jeopardize anyone. By the time the war in Europe ended and the mass liberations of the POW and concentration camps had taken place, the story of one woman imprisoned for four months could not compete. The numbers of the SWPA nurses were also helpful. Three of the nurses in the Philippines authored manuscripts which described their experiences and provided copies to the Army Nurse Corps. Their story was also kept alive by the nurses who remained on active duty. The last nurse POW to retire was Lieutenant Colonel Hattie R. Brantley who retired February 1, 1969. Even those nurses were not consistently recognized. It was not until 1983 that they were included in the annual national MIA/POW recognition day. That they were included then spoke again of their numbers and their participation in POW associations. Lieutenant Whittle did not join any POW groups and did not share her memoirs.

The reception Lieutenant Whittle's appeals received is less easy to explain. One would anticipate that a former POW would be granted any benefit of doubt. It can only be hypothesized that the brevity of her imprisonment and her psychiatric diagnosis, which is not infrequently viewed as malingering, prejudiced her case. In addition, her multiple appeals may easily have become an irritant to the offices tasked with researching and answering them. Individuals may have ardently looked for reasons to substantiate the original decisions, rather than reasons to reverse those decisions.



One thing is certain. In the eyes of the public, Second Lieutenant Reba Z. Whittle, AN, has remained the forgotten POW.

## ENDNOTES

1. Mary E.V. Frank, "Army and Navy Nurses held As Prisoners of War During World War II". Minerva, Vol. 6, Summer 1988, pp. 82-88.

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